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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

14 October 1983

MILITARY SITUATION IN ANGOLA

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Summary

Soviet and Cuban arms shipments over the last few months have merely added to Luanda's already substantial advantage in firepower over the lightly armed UNITA insurgents. Increased aid from Moscow and Havana nevertheless will strengthen Luanda's hold on major cities and key garrisons. UNITA in any case probably could not have challenged these strongly defended points. Moreover, the insurgent offensive planned for the next six months is aimed at broad areas of the Angolan countryside and apparently intends to do little more than harass or further isolate the major garrisons. As long as Angolan troops bear the brunt of the fighting in the countryside, however, the insurgents seem likely to retain the initiative.

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This memorandum was prepared for the Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs at the request of the NIO for Africa

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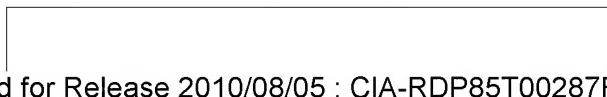
[redacted] It was written by [redacted] Africa Division of the Office of African and Latin American Analysis. It has been coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Questions and comments are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Africa Division, ALA

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Recent Soviet and Cuban Assistance

Since mid-year there have been substantial deliveries of Soviet weapons and military equipment to Angola.

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The Cubans have also stepped up their support. Five Cuban ships delivered arms in recent months including some 33 medium tanks and several armored personnel carriers. In July, Havana reportedly sent 800 more troops to stiffen the defenses around Luanda.

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A high-level Angolan delegation visited Moscow in early September apparently to ask for more arms. The Angolans also told Havana in September they might ask for more troops and the Cubans said they would be sent if needed, suggesting Havana has at least considered additional augmentation.

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But More Arms Are Not The Answer

Both Moscow and Havana will find it difficult to provide meaningful assistance for operations against UNITA. Soviet arms shipments merely add to Luanda's already substantial advantage in firepower over the lightly armed guerrillas. Furthermore, the Angolan army does not have enough trained soldiers to operate even a limited amount of complex equipment. More hardware does not address the Army's principal military weakness--the poor performance of its soldiers, who are badly led, trained and motivated.

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Furthermore, much of the military assistance received by Angola has been intended to strengthen the air defenses in the south. Despite the expanding UNITA operations, Luanda remains preoccupied with the South African threat from the occupied buffer zone in southern Angola and from northern Namibia. Those weapons that will be useful against the insurgents [redacted] are still too few in number to cause a decisive shift in the balance of forces.

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Unless Havana decides to change its current policy on how its troops are used, adding to the 25,000 to 30,000 man Cuban military presence in Angola is not likely to have much effect. The Cubans play a supporting role to the Angolans fighting in the field and the Cuban troops guard the main defense line in the south against deeper South African penetration and protect the main garrisons threatened by UNITA elsewhere. Havana could be forced to reverse its longstanding practice of avoiding direct clashes with UNITA, even though [redacted] popular discontent is growing over casualties in Angola.

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The increased aid from Moscow and Havana probably strengthens Luanda's hold on major cities and garrisons. UNITA in any case probably could not challenge--and apparently has no intention of attacking--these strongly defended points. As long as Angolan troops bear the brunt of the fighting in the countryside, the insurgents seem likely to retain the initiative there.

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Moscow, and no doubt Havana, are concerned over adverse trends in Angola.

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Angola's inability to challenge UNITA on the ground might lead it to use what airpower it has to attack UNITA's bases in the southeast. Luanda

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has had this capability for years but so far has not chosen to exercise the option. Such airstrikes, however, near the Namibian border would risk a South African response. [redacted]

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Luanda Prepares Its Defenses

Luanda was shaken by the UNITA victories in August and the loss of Cangamba was a psychological as well as a military blow to the government. The government apparently is also aware of UNITA's plans for the coming months, and is moving its forces to bolster threatened garrisons and is revamping its security forces. [redacted]

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Luanda is building up key garrisons in the north and east [redacted] improvements to the airfield at Luena and efforts to fortify the garrison. The government has also established a small outpost south of Luena, apparently to block moves from that direction. [redacted]
[redacted]

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Combat aircraft and helicopters were moved to Malange in late August and additional ground troops apparently have moved into the town. Malange apparently will be a key base in the northwest. UNITA has been nibbling at the edges of Malange for several months and has, on occasion, blocked the rail and road links to the city. [redacted]

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Luanda probably is having difficulty finding sufficient troops to rebuild its threatened northern garrisons. Troop strength in the north was drawn down several years ago when Luanda believed it was threatened primarily in the south and central highlands. The redeployments to the north will add more strain to their already thinly stretched army. [redacted] some Angolan

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and Cuban troops from Lubango--a high priority area for defense against South Africa--were flown to Malange in August. Moreover, Luanda has launched a highly publicized recruiting campaign that apparently is intended to round up all those capable of carrying arms. [redacted]

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The government is also pushing ahead with its plans to reorganize the security forces. Luanda announced in late July that the military would assume direct rule in provinces threatened by UNITA and so far has established new military councils in Luena, Malange, Huambo, Benguela, and Lubango. President dos Santos apparently believes that unifying all civil and military authority in the various regions under a military council directly responsible to him will end the bickering between the Army and local security forces that has marred previous counterinsurgency efforts. Dos Santos has also traveled to the threatened areas to give major speeches stressing the government's resolve. [redacted]

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The government presently is publicizing its small counterinsurgency operations in various parts of the country and probably will soon announce another of its larger periodic campaigns. Its forces, however, are unlikely to be able to do much more than conduct limited forays in the vicinity of the major garrisons or along the key transportation links.

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UNITA's Coming Offensive

In a major radio address in late August, Jonas Savimbi said that UNITA would intensify its operations throughout the country in October and extend the conflict to areas as yet untouched by the insurgents. The promised offensive--to last through April and coincide with the rainy season--is to be two or three times larger than the highly successful August campaign which was capped by the capture of Cangamba. UNITA claims about 10,000 insurgents were involved in the August fighting.

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Besides expanding UNITA's area of operations, the offensive is also intended to further weaken Luanda economically. The move to the northwest will for the first time bring the war to coffee producing areas north of Malange. UNITA has already moved to cut access to the diamond mines in the northeast, and recently [redacted] preparations were being made to attack the mines near Saurimo. Moreover, Savimbi claims to have formed commando units for raids on the US-operated oil production facilities in Cabinda. Oil provides over 80-percent of Angola's foreign exchange; diamonds and coffee provide almost all the remainder.

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UNITA apparently does not plan direct frontal attacks on large well-defended garrisons. Savimbi said UNITA would harass government held towns with special commando units and implied that the insurgents would isolate rather than capture the towns. Direct attacks on the larger garrisons such as Cangamba have proven costly to the insurgents because their concentrated forces become vulnerable to the government's superiority in firepower and airpower.

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The promised offensive appears to be within the capabilities of the insurgents, although all their expectations probably will not be fully satisfied. The plan emphasizes UNITA's strengths: its ability to operate in small units throughout the countryside; its superiority over small lightly-defended government outposts; and its ability to isolate main garrisons for long periods of time. The provincial capital at Huambo, for example, has been in a state of siege since late last year and [redacted] government control does not extend

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beyond a five mile radius from the town. UNITA apparently plans similar operations around Luena and Malange. [redacted]

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The South Africans undoubtedly are continuing to provide substantial materiel support to the insurgents. The surge in UNITA activity since late last year could not have occurred, in our judgment, without stepped up assistance from Pretoria, probably beginning in mid-1982. Furthermore, we believe that UNITA's future plans require that this support be continued. [redacted]

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Luanda still claims South Africa provided direct military assistance in the form of airstrikes to assist UNITA's capture of Cangamba, a claim which Pretoria still vehemently denies. The available evidence does not confirm the claims of either side, although both Luanda and Pretoria had aircraft in the region capable of bombing Cangamba. [redacted]

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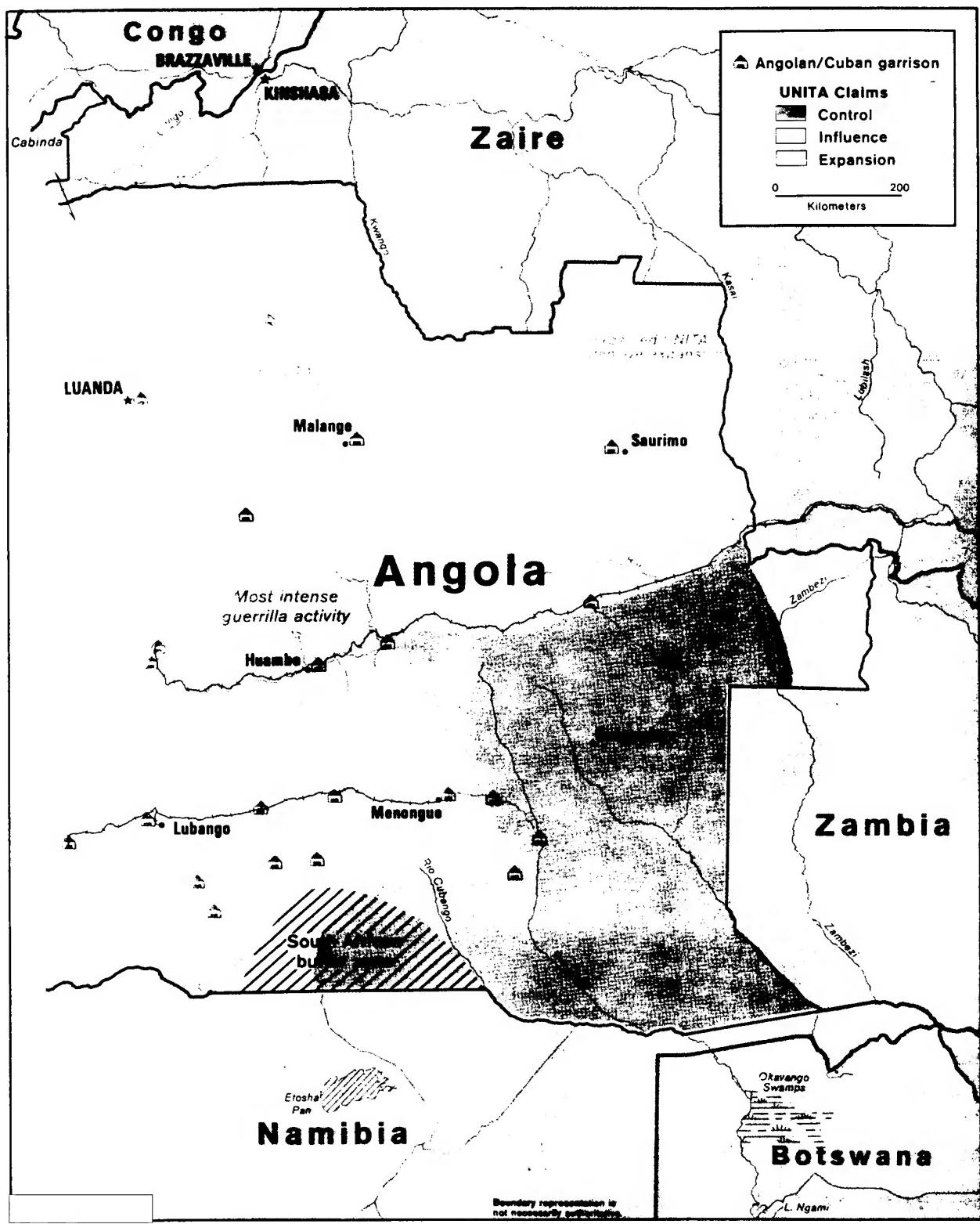
Pretoria has in the past shied away from direct military assistance to the insurgents and has limited its support to materiel, advisory and training assistance. South Africa probably will continue this policy and even if they did directly participate in the Cangamba battle it presumably was a one-time shot and not indicative of a major shift in policy. [redacted]

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